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Conference Abstract

Keeping the Integrity of Platforms with a Worldwide Scope in the Current Complex Geopolitical Landscape

Patricia Mergen[‡,§], Frederik Leliaert[‡], Sofie Meeus[‡], Nicole Hanquart[|]

‡ Meise Botanic Garden, Meise, Belgium
§ Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium
| Botanic Garden Meise, Meise, Belgium

Corresponding author: Patricia Mergen (patricia.mergen@plantentuinmeise.be)

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Abstract

There is an ever growing pressure on global platforms in the current difficult geopolitical context, and this is threatening international collaborations across continents and the tackling of acute challenges that need to be addressed at a planetary level (Lenton 2023) such as climate change or biodiversity loss (U.N.E.S.C.O. 2023). If the integrity of such platforms is not guaranteed anymore; if information becomes fragmented by being based only on data from a continent, region or country; if access from outside the place where the platform is hosted becomes restricted, then scientific research as we know it—including international collaborations—will be seriously jeopardized (Gates et al. 2025). In addition to the arguments of strategic autonomy or competitiveness, the countries or for example, European Union (EU) authorities, are panicking (unfortunately for good reason) because of the increase in number and higher impact of recent cyberattacks. Hence, governments impose ever stricter cybersecurity rules that could hamper or at least seriously slow down the pace of international collaborative scientific research. Authorities are trying to secure virtual working environments with ever increasing rules and associated administration (EU AI Act or The Digital Services Act). Notably when it comes to information-technology-related activities, such as testing new technologies not yet fully secured or working with cross-border developed software, it becomes more complex to

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get the authorisations to proceed and deploy in multiple countries (EU risk based approach). There are measures discussed, for example in Europe, to support global platforms that are considering hosting and mirroring or at least backing up the content. Shockingly, some authorities want to address only the European content hosted outside Europe and potentially at risk, but do not want to invest into keeping the integrity of the global systems, diminshing their usefullness for the users needing a global context for their studies. By not backing up the non-EU content as well, they overlook that the users need access to data worldwide in scope. One additional issue is that personnel data and data protection breaches are treated differently in the United States (US) and in the EU as rules differ in the matter (i.e., US Cloud Act versus EU GDPR [General Data Protection Regulation]).

This presentation highlights the risky situation of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL), which has to find a new host. In April 2025, BHL (BHL 2025) announced that the Smithsonian Institution would no longer host the administrative functions of the BHL consortium as of 1 January 2026. BHL represents more than 63 million freely accessible pages to the user community and is widely used with approximately 200–300k searches per day, notably on scientific names of species. We would like to analyse a model where subcriptions to lesser-used closed-source journals or articles are decreased to change to a per article on-demand payment model. The saved budget could be reallocated to support platforms such as the above mentioned BHL or as additional funding for GBIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facility) much needed by our researchers instead. Additionally, we show examples of how the EU AI Act and the Flemish Research Foundation have found workable solutions to address the risks, while impacting international collaboration as minimally as possible. For example, AI systems developed outside the EU and considered risky, would not be forbidden but undergo stricter control, with official representatives based in the EU supervising their usage, implementation, and deployment following the EU legislation. The Flemish goverment, via the FWO (Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaandern), confirmed that international collaborations remain essential for excellent research, while acknowledging the risks by implementing research security procedures as a workable compromise.

Keywords

global platforms, Biodiversity Heritage Library, GBIF, risks

Presenting author

Patricia Mergen

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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